



National Transportation Safety Board

The Chairman's Corner

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Friday, August 10, 2007

NTSB Determines Comair 5191 Flight Crew Failed To Use Available Cues To Determine Location During Takeoff



The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of the Comair flight 5191 accident in Lexington, Kentucky was the flight crew's failure to use available cues and aids to identify the airplane's location on the airport surface during taxi and their failure to cross check and verify that the airplane was on the correct runway before takeoff. Contributing to this accident were the flight crew's nonpertinent conversation during taxi, which resulted in loss of positional awareness and the Federal Aviation Administration's failure to require that all runway crossings be authorized only by specific air traffic control clearances.

"This accident was caused by poor human performance," said NTSB Chairman Mark V. Rosenker. "Forty-nine lives could have been saved if the flight crew had been concentrating on the important task of operating the airplane in a safe manner."

On August 27, 2006, about 6:07 a.m., Comair flight 5191, a Bombardier CRJ-100, (N431CA) crashed on takeoff from Blue Grass Airport in Lexington, Kentucky. The flight crew was instructed to take off from runway 22, an air carrier runway that is 7,003 feet long. Instead, the flight crew lined up the airplane on runway 26, a 3,501-foot-long runway, and began the takeoff roll. Of the 47 passengers and 3 crewmembers onboard, 49 were fatally injured and one (the first officer) received serious injuries. Impact forces and a post crash fire destroyed the airplane.

Go -Teams Launched to Aviation and Highway Accidents



Member Chealander addresses the media in Phoenix

The NTSB launched two go-teams over the past two weeks. The first was to Phoenix, Arizona on July 27 to investigate a midair collision involving two news helicopters.

On Friday afternoon, July 27, about 1:30 pm Pacific Standard Time, two television news station helicopters, both Eurocopter AS-350 B2 models (N613TV and N215TV) collided midair and crashed in north-central Phoenix, Arizona while filming a high speed police pursuit. The four occupants died. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed.

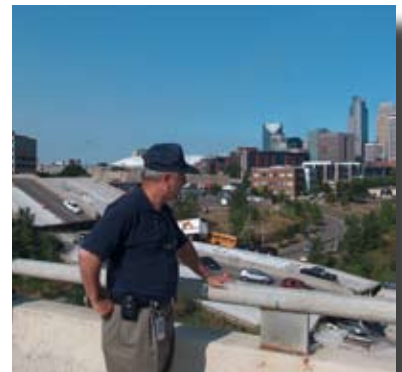
The helicopters were operated by KNXV-TV Channel 15 and KTVK Channel 3 in Phoenix. The Phoenix Police Department reported that no one on the ground was injured.

The investigator-in-charge was Howard Plagens (SWRA). Kristi Dunks (SWRA) assisted. Member Chealander, along with Terry Williams (PA), and Ron Price (AS-40) traveled to Phoenix. Sandy Rowlett (AS-30) assisted from HQ for ATC and radar. Parties to the investigation are Eurocopter, Turbo Meca, FAA, Channel 15 & Channel 3 aviation departments.



President Bush meets with the NTSB team on-site

The second launch occurred on August 1, when the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis, collapsed into the Mississippi River. Initial reports indicated that 20 to 30 vehicles were on the bridge and that several fell into the river. Chairman Rosenker was on scene during the investigation, and was accompanied by a team of some 16 staff members. Gary van Etten was the IIC, and Terry Williams was the press officer traveling with the team.



Chairman Rosenker assesses the damage from the I-35W bridge collapse

Chairman Rosenker Welcomes News Of Record-Low Traffic Fatality Rate

National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Mark V. Rosenker welcomed the news that traffic fatalities in the United States fell to their lowest rate since the government has been keeping these statistics.

"I was pleased to see that traffic fatalities, which make up more than 90 percent of transportation deaths in this country, fell to a record low rate in 2006," Rosenker said. "However, we still lost more than 42,000 of our fellow citizens, and we have a long way to go to stop this senseless loss of life."

Rosenker noted that the success in lowering the fatality rate is the result of many sectors of society working together, including government regulators in the U.S. Department of Transportation, state and federal law enforcement officials, vehicle manufacturers and private advocacy groups.

"I'm also proud of the role the NTSB has played over its 40-year history. We have led the way in recommending life-saving laws like age-21 drinking laws, graduated drivers licenses, primary seat belt laws, mandatory child restraint laws, and anti-collision technology."

Bucking the trend of declining fatalities, motorcycle deaths rose by 5.1 percent in 2006. The Safety Board conducted a motorcycle safety forum late last year to explore safety concerns in that sector of transportation.

There are a number of highway safety issues on the Board's Most Wanted List of Safety Improvements, including promoting youth highway safety, eliminating hard core drinking driving, and enhancing the protection of school bus passengers.

"I call on all stakeholders to continue to promote improvements in vehicle design and to continue to strengthen highway safety laws so that this fatality rate can continue its historic decline," Rosenker said.

Member Higgins Meets With Maritime Advisory Committee

On August 1st, Board Member Kathryn Higgins and Christopher Julius, Deputy Director of the Office of Marine Safety, traveled to Oakland, California to present the NTSB findings from the *Athena 106* deck barge accident to MACOSH, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's maritime advisory committee. While in California, Member Higgins and Mr. Julius also met with officials of The California Maritime Academy in Vallejo, California.

Frank Hilldrup Selected As International Aviation Safety Program Specialist



Frank Hilldrup (AS-10) has been selected as an International Aviation Safety Program Specialist. He is a graduate in mechanical engineering from Virginia Tech University, and has been employed with the NTSB in the Office of Aviation Safety for over 17 years. He has served as Structures Group Chairman in major air carrier accident investigations, specializing in coordinating difficult underwater wreckage recoveries. For the past 7 years, Mr. Hilldrup has been an Investigator-in-Charge on major domestic aviation accidents and has served as the U.S. Accredited Representative on major foreign aviation accidents. In this capacity, he has traveled the world, drawing praise from the international aviation community. His vast investigative experience and exceptional diplomatic skills will suit him well in this new position.

NTSB Headquarters Space Consolidation Complete

As previously reported in the May 25, 2007 edition of Chairman's Corner, the NTSB has initiated a Space Consolidation Plan to reduce excess square footage. At the present time, there have been 115 personnel moves completed. The Office of Rail, Pipeline and Hazardous Material Safety (RPH) has moved to the 5th floor (470 side), and the Office of Administration has moved to the suite formerly occupied by RPH on 4th floor. The Chief Information Officer has consolidated and is now located in the former Human Resources suite on 4th floor. The Offices of Aviation Safety and Research and Engineering have consolidated in place on the 5th floor. In the next phase of the consolidation, the Administrative Services Division will clear furniture and equipment from the vacated 4th floor space by the end of August, freeing up 9,700 square feet of space for a potential sublease. Several Federal agencies expressed strong interest in subleasing this space. The Office of Administration would like to thank the staff for their patience and cooperation during the moves.

Next Chairman's Corner In September

The next Chairman's Corner will be published on September 7. Please enjoy the remainder of the summer!